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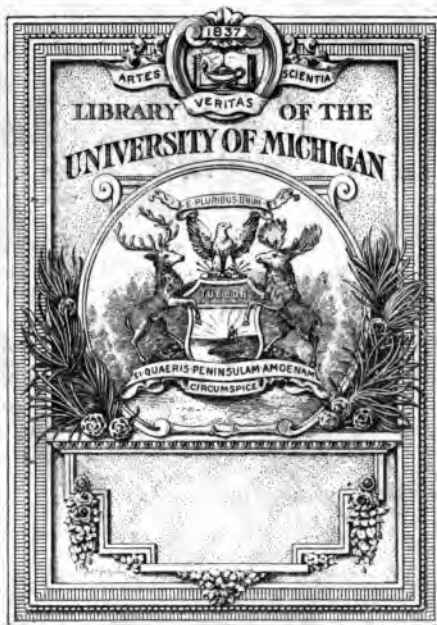
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IRISH LITERATURE

IN THE

ENGLISH TONGUE

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BROOKE





so many things in a right and delightful way about Irish literature that it leaves those who follow it under the risk of repetition. I am driven, then, out of many fields over which I should like to wander to-night, and confined to one—“*In what way we can best make the English Language the instrument of Irish Literature.*”

I am glad that our London Society was preceded by the Dublin Society. That our head-quarters should be established in the centre of English life is significant of a happier union between England and Ireland; but it would have been unfitting if the first words of common Irish action for the sake of Irish literature had not been spoken in the centre of

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*THE NEED AND USE OF GETTING  
IRISH LITERATURE INTO THE  
ENGLISH TONGUE*



THE NEED AND USE  
OF  
GETTING IRISH LITERATURE  
INTO THE  
ENGLISH TONGUE

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AN ADDRESS BY  
STOPFORD A. BROOKE

*At the Inaugural Meeting of the Irish Literary Society  
Established in London*

ALFRED PERCIVAL GRAVES, M.A., in the Chair

London  
T. FISHER UNWIN  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

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## PREFACE.



THE Lecture here presented to the public was delivered at the first meeting of the *Irish Literary Society* in London. The Society was founded to bring together all the Irish men and women in London who took pleasure in the literature and language of Ireland, in her past history, politics, and conditions, in her topography, antiquities, music, and scenery ; and who were desirous to aid in the publication of a series of books—with the general title of *The Irish Library*—

which should deal with all these subjects. But this historical and literary aim was accompanied by a social aim. The founders of the Society wished to gather together the Irishmen in London, to make them friends, to provide for them a pleasant place of meeting, a library, a little city of their own, where men and women of all shades of politics and of all classes of society might recognise their national unity and find a common home.

I felt deeply the honour done to me when I was asked to deliver the inaugural lecture, and I felt as deeply how little I was fitted, and how much better others were, to write this Lecture. But I was so interested in the work of the Society ; I was



so delighted to think that we should perhaps induce England to look more fully into Irish literature, and especially Irish heroic literature; I was so entirely at one with the aims of the Society; I was so glad to meet more of my countrymen, and Ireland was so dear to me, that I forgot my own unfitness for the work, and only thought of the work itself.

3 Our ship is now launched. May favouring winds attend it; may its merchandise be good and beautiful, and, having touched fortunately at divers lands, may it enter happily into harbour.

STOPFORD A. BROOKE.



## THE NEED AND USE OF GETTING IRISH LITERATURE INTO THE ENGLISH TONGUE.



WE hold this meeting to-night to inaugurate the Irish Literary Society in London. Another society of the same kind has already been inaugurated in Dublin by Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, and the lecture delivered by Dr. Sigerson. This is a lecture which ought to be rescued from the transitory pages of a review, and it will be well to print it separately for our Library. It says


Irish life, and on the well-loved soil of Ireland.

We set up this little nook to bring together into social union all the Irish in London who care for the genius of their native land, or who desire to make its poetry and its prose known to the peoples who speak English all over the world. Our social work with these will lie in London, and our organising work will have its centre here ; but it is from Ireland that we draw our inspiration. Our thoughts, emotions, and hopes converge to her, and our chief interests gather round her literature.

The earliest and noblest part of that literature was national, but not nationalist. It was fully Irish ; written out of the heart of her own people,

it was but little influenced by other literatures; and in it, at least, we can forget our quarrels of party, and quarrels of religion. It is not so easy to forget these quarrels when we read the literature which followed the invasion of Ireland by the English, and accompanied the oppression and misery which then overwhelmed the country, and the terrible story of which is reckoned not by years, but by centuries. That literature may be said to be nationalist as well as national. It was forced to conceive Ireland as a whole and as set over against England. In this opposition and out of this oppression the patriotic sentiment was born which caused her poets and her people to make Ireland into a pathetic personality, who could

be loved like a woman and worshipped like a queen. I do not think it too much to say that the modern idea of "nationality" was born for the first time in Ireland. There are many songs addressed to her, conceived of as a beautiful woman, long before the time of Elizabeth. All the warring chieftainries were at one in their common love of her; and this impersonation of Ireland as the lovely and sorrowful woman, oppressed, but never crushed; wounded by England, but always recovering from her wounds, appears in the work of all the Irish-writing poets, up to the present century; and continues to appear, during this century, in the poetry written by Irishmen in the English tongue.



Men find it difficult to speak of that literature (so eminently "nationalist" from its very birth) without sharing in the feelings which prompted it, and without importing into the discussion of it the political excitement of the present day. It is well sometimes to stimulate the present by the past, to kindle by pity the warlike spirit when men are contending for liberty to be themselves; but it is not always well. We shall have enough of disputing, enough of national pity and fervour when, in the lectures which will hereafter be given in this hall on Irish writings, all the listeners will have an opportunity to speak and maintain their own opinions; but to-night, when no discussion takes place, I am under *geasa*, like an Irish hero, not to enter into party politics.

This is an hour given to peace ; and it would be well if in this society we were to speak more than we do of literature as literature ; and to use it less than we do either as a means for beginning a political debate, or for sharpening our weapons in a fight. For then, Literature herself, who is a quiet lady, and who says with Milton, when in the political storm he longed to build his epic, " Not in these Noises "—flies away from us to her own stormless land. In this Society I think we should try to remember that our foremost interests are literary, not political. There are among us Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists, men of all the various parties ; and, during this evening at least, we are disarmed. We



..speak together pleasantly, as French and English did in the Peninsula, when beside the brook in the evening they drew water for the armies that in the morning were to renew the battle. As the dead who were enemies are reconciled at last when they lie together in some great church like that of Westminster, so living foes are reconciled when they walk together in the great Temple of their country's literature. A lovely song, a noble story, makes all men into brothers while they listen. In them there is neither English nor Irish, Catholic nor Protestant, Nationalist nor Unionist, learned nor unlearned, peasant nor landlord, but Imagination is all, and in all.

It is from no want of sympathy

with Irish Nationalism that I say these things. I have been a Nationalist for more than thirty years. I hold that the self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control of any people, that its continuous life, its power to work, to create, and to inspire; its influence for good on mankind, depend on its preserving and jealously guarding its distinctive nationality. The more individual it is, the more it will be able to minister to the progress of all nations, of all mankind. No nation has ever felt that more keenly than the English nation, and England ought to praise rather than to blame Ireland for her devotion to the idea of her nationality. Ireland stands, in her national effort, on the same principles

on which England has stood for centuries, and she would be out of step with England if she did not contend for the national idea.

But there is a better way of doing this thing than the way of aggressive nationalism, if we in Ireland only could get beyond the point up to which aggressiveness is necessary. It is to prove our distinctive national feeling and the continuity of our national being, by showing that there has been a continuous literature existing in Ireland from the beginning of her life ; that this literature has steadily represented from century to century the national feeling ; and that it has always been an individual literature, having its own special elements, and its own separate influence on other literatures.

One of the deepest roots of English nationality is the continuity of her national literature, and Englishmen have incessantly laboured to keep their literature together, to honour it, and to extend it. It is inwoven with the whole of her national life, and it makes half the passion of her nationality. And if we wish to strengthen Irish nationality, to prove it more clearly to the world, to send it back as far into the past as the nationality of England, we cannot do better than make it largely rest on Irish Literature ; and we have not done that as yet.

Irish Literature is not to Ireland what English Literature is to England. The mass of the Irish people know nothing of it, and care little about it.

That they should know, and should care will do more for the cause of a true Nationalism than all our political angers. Moreover, with the perishing of the Irish language as the tongue of the people—and it is perishing with accelerating speed—the popular interest that once gathered round her past literature is vanishing away. A few scholars still love and honour it, and know the tongue in which it is written, but the politicians on both sides and most of the peasantry have lost their lingual tie to the past; they have no literary nationality. It is a great pity, and the Welsh were wiser than the Irish. A people who are only politically national are weaker in national sentiment than a people who love their ancient literature

and language ; and Ireland is day by day suffering a greater national loss than she imagines. She will bitterly regret it, unless she repent and do work meet for repentance. She knows less of her literature than the French and Germans know of it. Even the Irish scholars in Ireland have no more enthusiasm for her past writings than the Irish scholars in France and Germany. I hope this society and the kindred society in Dublin will do something to repair this error. I hope that the books they publish will not be polemic rather than literary. Let us have history and politics by all means, but let us take care also of our oldest and fairest heritage. A common love of the beautiful things which distinguish our nation from

other nations, will make us love and honour our country more than a common war against those who oppose our nationality.

And, indeed, there is scarcely any modern literature which has been so continuous as ours, or so old. It is true we have no long manuscripts older than the tenth or eleventh century, but the materials out of which the manuscripts were built, go back to a remoter antiquity than either English or Welsh Literature. They contain stories of a finer imaginative quality than the early Welsh or English stories. Their poetical elements are more instinct with nature and humanity, and they have a more kindling and inspiring influence on the imagination of other peoples than

flows forth from the beginnings of any other vernacular European literature. This early literature is written in the Irish tongue, and it consists, at the beginning, of mythical histories full of wild and romantic episodes. These, which recount the legendary invasions of Erin in pre-historic times by tribes whose leaders were divine or half-divine, are of the highest interest to the critical mythologist. But they also contain, or have referred to their period, tales of as great interest to the seeker of fine literature. "The Three Sorrows of Story-telling" belong to this distant world—the fate of the Children of Lir, the story of the Children of Tuireann, the story of the Sons of Uisneach. After this mythological



cycle come the successive cycles of heroic tale (having also their mythical elements)—the cycle of Ulster, the cycle of Leinster—the first of which gathers round Conchobar and Cuculainn, and the second round Finn and Oisín and Oscar. Among these heroic figures a multitude of other heroes stand, each of whom, like the Knights of the Round Table, has his own tale. Mingled through and through these stories, there are a number of episodic legends, tales of battles, of voyages, of destructions, of slaughters, of sieges, of tragedies, of cow-spoils, of courtships, of caves, of adventures, of war-expeditions, of feasts, of elopements, of loves, of inundations, of immigrations, and of visions. Along with these, there are a num-

ber of poems and of imaginative tales partly in verse and partly in prose ; and the most of these originally belonged to pre-Christian times. Then follow the Christian legends, and the Christian re-workings of the ancient tales ; the lives of the Irish Saints, the records of the Martyrs and the Feasts, the monastic writings, the liturgies, the prophecies, the laws, and the histories.

A great deal contained in this vast mass of manuscripts is not literature, that is, it is not noble thought and passionate feeling expressed in beautiful form, and this Society will scarcely care to reproduce these inferior pieces in translation. They will not be, however, neglected, for it is these very pieces which are often

most interesting to the philologist, the historian, and the antiquary. They are sure to be edited from time to time. Our work on this ancient literature ought to confine itself to the pieces of the finest quality, the tales and poems which are full of humanity and of nature, which breathe the Irish spirit in every page; where the mythical elements are most vigorous, and where the heroic elements are most instinct with natural and supernatural imagination.

Translation, then, is our business. We wish to get the ancient Irish literature well and statelily afloat on the world-wide ocean of the English language, so that it may be known and loved wherever the English language goes.

A good deal of translation has already been done in time past by the Royal Irish Academy, by the Ossianic and kindred societies. But it has not, with a few exceptions, been done in good English, nor with a sufficiently critical knowledge of the Irish language. Since these early efforts, scholars in Ireland, France, and Germany have edited carefully many of the Irish Texts ; their language and chronology has been critically studied ; their historical value estimated, and their mythical elements weighed and compared with those of other lands. Owing to this more modern work, good translations are now more in our power ; and the first thing to do is to get the best forms

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of the heroic stories and poems into *accurate* translation. We need clear representations of the originals, but in better English than they have as yet attained, in such English as the *Silva Gadelica* which Mr. Hayes O'Grady has recently issued — simple and lucid English, with few Latin words, having a certain running but subtle rhythm of its own; as much of a poetic movement as is compatible with fine prose, and done by men who have the love of noble form and the power of shaping it. Literature should be still kept literature in the translating tongue. The translator ought to be not only a scholar, but also an artist.

That is the first thing to be done. It is necessary to satisfy the scholars

who justly demand that we should have before us the very material itself as it was thrown into shape by early Irish writers.<sup>1</sup> It is only when this accurate translation is made that we shall be able to isolate the ancient work from the additions and ornaments of the middle Irish period. It is only then that we can see how to separate the Pagan from the Christian elements. It is only then, by careful comparison of the various forms of the same stories, that we can attempt to date the oldest. It is only then, when no modern additions and fancies trouble us, that we can get to the bottom of the

<sup>1</sup> The Book of Leinster was *transcribed* in the 11th century. Tales and poems contained in it are written in a language which, as we know from "glosses," was then archaic.

mythology or conceive at all the ancient religions of the Irish. Moreover, in slight sentences, in the usages of words, in terms of phrase, which can only be estimated by philologists or translated by scholars, lie hid manners and customs and rites, identifications of places, hints that illuminate history—all of which we should pass by if the translation were not close to the original. I wish we had an Early Irish Text Society.

When such translations have been made, then we should have the materials for the second thing I should wish done, and then we should have the right to do it. That second thing—and it is this in which I am chiefly interested in from the point of view of literature—is that Irishmen of forma-

tive genius should take, one by one, the various cycles of Irish tales, and grouping each of them round one central figure, such as Manannàn or Cuculainn or Finn, supply to each a dominant human interest to which every event in the whole should converge. It would then be possible to add to each of these cycles either a religious centre such as the Holy Grail was to the Arthurian tales ; or a passionate centre such as the love of Lancelot and Guinevere—and this would knit together the reworking of each cycle into an imaginative unity. I want, in fact, the writers to recreate each cycle in his own mind into a clearly constructed whole, having an end to which the beginning looks forward, and to promote which every episode



is used. This single web of a quasi-epic narrative ought to be put into a form and written in language fitted for the reading of our own time, but preserving the ancients of the story. The books ought to be done in prose, and the way in which Malory treated the various Arthurian tales is a good example of what I mean.

I look on this as of the greatest importance for the floating of Irish story in the world, for its favourable reception, use, and influence. This is quite a lawful thing to do *when* we have first secured our accurate translations, and if we keep close to the ancient customs, dress, armour, and manners. If, indeed, we want literature, it is a necessary thing to do. The monastic and bardic editors of

the ancient tales, ornamented them with an exuberance of epithet and adjective which proves the weakness of their art. The events they added, the new legends they invented, are grafted clumsily for the most part into the original stock. The earlier the manuscript the better is the work, that is, the more the original is let alone. The newer the work, the more flamboyant is the ornament. Instead of any selection, any care being exercised in the materials; instead of any effort after unity or form being made, a riotous crowd of added materials are shot into the story, and the whole is huddled together without an aim, without a central point, without any careful evolution of the story to a necessary

catastrophe. The recasting of all the legendary cycles into a fine form is an absolute necessity, if they are to impress the imagination of mankind.

What I ask is no new thing. It was due to such recasting by fine shapers that the story of Arthur continued to give a lasting impulse to imagination. Had not the inventors of the story of the Holy Grail grouped around that story into order and unity the greater number of the disconnected tales told of the various Knights of the Round Table ; had not Malory afterwards taken the loves of Lancelot and Guinevere as the one point with which he connected all the tales, and from which he wrought out the catastrophe—shaping all his work into a passionate unity—the

Arthur story would never have wrought from generation to generation in the literature of England. This is the kind of work which should be done in the romantic cycles of Ireland; and no work could be more fascinating.<sup>1</sup> Nor can any

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Standish O'Grady has already felt how much may be done in this way, and his *Mythical History of Ireland*, in two volumes, contains a part of the story of Cuculainn told in epic fashion, and worked into a whole. It is delightfully told, but a little too much in the Homeric manner. It would have been better had he invented his own manner, and if the manner had been Celtic rather than Greek in suggestion. Moreover the story of Cuculainn ought to have been isolated into a single volume, and not mixed up in the same book with other epic narratives; and it should have been more frankly a story. It is troubled, as the whole of the book is, with bits of history or what seems history, with antiquarian notes, with matters which take us out of the

better foundation be laid for Irish Nationalism, nor for future Irish poetry.

The third kind of work on these imaginative tales may be more fitly done in verse than in prose. The main stories are full of episodes, of the adventures of selected heroes, such as were intruded by men who wanted fresh subjects into the Arthurian Tale; of the births and deaths of champions, such as the birth of Cuculainn who is the son of a god, or the death of Conairey which has been so well isolated by Sir S.

imaginative world. I wish he would take the Cuculainn, adding the episodes he has omitted, giving it a fine unity, leaving out all historical disquisitions which are hateful in an imaginative work—and then, when he has done this, write, in the same way, the tale of Finn.

Ferguson ; of fairy loves for mortal men, as that of Fand for Cuculainn who ravishes the hero into her magic country for a year ; or that of the fairy Princess for Oisín who carries him, riding over the green ocean, to the land of everlasting youth ; of romantic voyages like that of St. Brendan, a story which enchanted Europe. These, and there are hundreds of them, form delightful subjects for short poems in English. They might be treated with great freedom ; recreated in a brilliant modern form ; and fashioned in new metres or in old. It would be difficult to do this well. The original exaggeration of colour, ornament, of wild war and love would have to be partly retained. The supernatural world which in all the

tales is the comrade of the natural, the primeval union of man's heart with Nature, the vivid sympathy of the great creatures of Nature like the Sea and Air with the fates of Ireland and her sons ; the tragic sorrows of love, of death, and of the "passion of death" for love's sake, as overwhelming among the ancient Irish as among the Arabs—these, with their high keen cry of emotion, would have to be represented in the English poems. And the difficulty of doing that without offending the genius of the English tongue would be very great ; but difficulties please a poet ; and it can be done. There is no better instance of a great success in one of these—with a full preservation of a Celtic spirit and

melody—than *The Voyage of Mael-dune* by Tennyson ; and I cannot help thinking that the Irish rather than the Welsh imagination had seized on Tennyson when he wrote *The Gleam*, one of the loveliest and most elfin of his poems.

Irishmen have, and with varying success, done work of this kind. Those have done the best who have invented new English rhythms for the Irish stories, somewhat in harmony with the extraordinary subtlety and variety of the Irish metres. Well-known English metres, like that used by Walter Scott in the *Minstrel*, or like blank verse—that specially English strain—carry with their sound too much of the special turn of the English imagina-



tion. They bring us, while we read the Irish stories in their movement, out of Ireland into England, and the Celtic ring is lost. The nearest approach in the past to good work of this kind was made by Sir S. Ferguson in his treatment of epic episodes, and by Clarence Mangan in his treatment of the later Irish lyrics. Many others have also done well—Callanan, Hennessey, Aubrey de Vere, Lady Wilde, Robert Joyce, Katharine Tynan, and our Chairman; but no better form has yet been given to Irish tales in English than that into which Dr. Todhunter has cast *The Children of Lir*, and Mr. Yeats *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

These manifold renderings are scattered among various books, and

they suffer from their dispersion. I should like to suggest to the Society to make a collection of them (if the writers and publishers give leave), and to set them forth in one volume, edited with a critical preface which should draw attention to what remains to be done in such translations. I think such a book would stimulate the young poets of Ireland to search out fresh subjects from the old stories and to shape them adequately.

A fourth kind of work on old Irish literature lies ready to our hand, and it has a clear relation to these ancient tales. It is the collection of the folk-stories of Ireland. Many of them are handed down from the earliest times, and they bear everywhere traces of

their origin. I do not mean such tales as Kennedy and Joyce collected, though some of these are folk-tales, but the stories which may be gathered from the lips of the old people at this very hour in Ireland. One man has begun this work, and Mr. Douglas Hyde's *Beside the Fire* is exactly the thing which ought now to be worked out in the four provinces of Ireland, wherever the Irish tongue is still spoken. Young men of literary power, who have a respect for accurate reproduction of the oral tale, and who will not ornament with their own fancies what they hear, might in their vacation time take down the folk-tales of Ireland from the lips of the peasants, as Campbell of Islay did from the lips of the Highlanders.

Hidden away in these tales there is lying unused a mass of poetic material, and of such historic interest as belongs to the Science of Folk-Lore which is rapidly perishing. The young men and women who speak Irish have fled from Ireland; the old who speak their own language, or who have kept their tales in memory, are dying out. In twenty years it will be too late to do this work. And it will be a great pity if it is not done. For, first, the soil is almost untouched. Collections of folk-tales have been made in Germany, in Scandinavia, in Italy, in France, in Scotland, in Russia — everywhere in Europe where a German could get. But till Mr. Douglas Hyde's book nothing has been syste-

matically done in Ireland. And, secondly, it would be a great pity, because so much of the material is lovely. The imagination of the Irish peasant is rarely gross, though it is grotesque ; is full of grace and tenderness, of pathetic joy and sorrow, and of a quick and changing fancifulness. The supernaturalism also of these tales is charming, and a quick fairy land opens before us as we listen to them. All Ireland is still haunted by the good people. Every green mound and ruin, every river, wood and hill, every lake and well and grey stone on the wild land, are dwelt in by their own little folk ; elfin creatures whom civilisation has not spoilt, who have their own kings and laws and morals and manners ;

and who are quite as delightful in their way as the Nymphs and Oreads, as Pan and all his crew. Some of them, it is true, since they descend from the gods and heroes of the myths, retain traces of their original grandeur, of something august and terrible, which distinguishes them clearly from the English fairies. But this makes them all the more interesting.

To collect and edit all these tales (as the French have edited the folklore of the French departments) would be a pleasant task for members of Irish literary societies, and an excellent contribution to the literature of their country. We have, then, in our ancient literature, and in the folk-tales which to-day are its remnants, a great



treasure-house of romantic, heroic, elfin, and supernatural stories which have not as yet been brought into any clear light, but which, when they are, will astonish and charm the world. It is a patriot's work to manifest the beautiful things which his country has done, that they may be loved and honoured, and by that he glorifies his nation far more than by increasing her commerce. The greatest wealth of a people is the wealth of their imagination.

The Irish tongue is now less and less spoken, and therefore our object is to get these treasures into fine form in the English tongue. We will think, while we do that, of the future we hope for Ireland, that happier, wiser future where greater

welfare will make a more joyous literature than she has had for centuries, where wider culture will make a greater literature, where established self-dependence will develop more of individual genius, where reverence for the more important things of a noble life will lessen year by year the religious and party quarrels which at present hinder the growth of a national literature. I commend to this Society the duty of taking pains that this coming Ireland has ready to her hand all the materials for an Irish literature which will be written in English. Ireland will, no doubt, win material for such a literature out of her own fresher and more individual life, but new literature ought to be linked back to the old; and the beautiful

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work of our country in the past will kindle her into the creation of beauty in the present. It has always been so in England; it ought to be so in Ireland. The ancient tales of Erin should move in her modern literature, as the story of Arthur, when it was seized by Englishmen, move in the literature of modern England.

And I believe that the influence of Irish Romance will extend beyond Ireland. It has already done so in the past, and in many parts of Europe; it has already done so in England. It is one of the many creative elements, and the earliest of them, which have combined to form the poetry of England—the most varied, and perhaps the noblest poetry of

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the modern world. It was the Irish imaginative spirit which was the most vital influence in the creation of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The whole of Northumbria was drenched with Irish sentiment. The mythology which the Danes brought into England, and which, though the traces are slight, must have had its kindling influence on English Song, certainly on the English Ballad, was itself coloured by the Irish myths, and some scholars have gone so far as to say that the most poetical parts of the Eddaic poems owe a large debt to the Irish who took up their dwellings in Iceland and the Western Isles. After the Norman Conquest the influence of Ireland on English poetry dies away, and that of the Welsh stories

begins to exercise its power, partly through the adaptations of them made by France, and partly through Wales itself. When Chaucer came there is scarcely a trace of any Irish influence. Later on, some have tried to show that Spenser gained a more deeply-felt sentiment of Nature than his fellows possessed from his long dwelling in Ireland; and this is probable enough. He has recorded his love of the mountains and trout streams and Kilcolman with ardour, and he admired the poetry of the Irish bards. But to dwell on this is to make much of one wave in the sea.

The Irish influence, however, came back to England in a roundabout way, but yet in a way every step of which may be distinctly traced. I

cannot trace it carefully to-night, but I will give you the general lines.

When English poetry, taking its first impulse from Chaucer, arose in the Lowlands of Scotland, it added to its Chaucerism certain qualities which were derived from the Irish blood which flowed, after centuries of inter-marriage with an Irish stock, through the veins of every Lowland family. These qualities were a love of colour, far greater than Chaucer's mediæval love of it, and especially shown in a minute and subtle observance of colour in Nature ; an equal love of Nature for her own sake, even a minute and affectionate observance of her remoter lovelinesses ; a wildness in sorrow and a triumph in joy far beyond the English steadiness in these

passions ; a weird, rarely a beautiful supernaturalism which filled the whole of daily life and pervaded every wood, hill, and river with dreadful being ; an equally sad and fiery amorousness which created lyrics of love in the very peasants, and which broke out fully in Burns who restored passion to English poetry ; an excessive individuality, and an excessive nationality ; and, finally, a fierceness of satire which was eminently characteristic (both in its form, its savagery, and its coarseness) of the Irish Bards in states of anger and vanity. These things differentiate English poetry in Scotland from English poetry in England from the time of Chaucer to the time of George the First, and they are directly derived from the Irish blood in the Scotch Lowlands.

One of them—the minute observance and the almost personal love of Nature for her own sake and in her solitudes—was handed down from the fifteenth century to one poet after another till the spiritual descent of it was represented in James Thomson, who brought it down to England at a time when love of Nature had almost wholly disappeared from English poetry. He is the ancestor and the impulse of that English poetry of Nature which, in this century, has grown into so great, so manifold, and so impassioned a choir, which has described and rendered lovelier every county in England, and which has filled all her scenery with the passions of humanity. That new poetry had its

far-off source in the love of the Irish poets for their native land and in their profound delight in the beauty of its scenery. England added to it out of her copious life her wider interests. Her mightier literature contributed to it a multitude of elements of which Ireland was not the source ; but nevertheless that which makes it differ from the previous poetry of natural description in England—*the love of Nature for its own sake*—had its far-off fountain in Irish poetry.

We see, then, Ireland has had her influence. I think that influence has even more to do in the future. English verse at this present moment wants a fresh impulse. I hope it will derive this partly from the social movement towards a simpler, wiser,

and happier life for both rich and poor, the grave excitement of which has already begun to act on society at large. I do not think that this movement itself is likely to be the subject of poetry, but I do think that it will emotionalise the whole of England into that temper of soul in which poetry becomes easy on all subjects. Many of these subjects will, of course, be found in the present, but poetry has always wanted, along with the present, an imaginative world in the past into which to dip for subjects ; and we have here in England pretty well exhausted the old realms of human story. The tale of Arthur will have to lie fallow for a time. We have had enough of the Greek stories of late ; enough of the Italian mediæval-



ism, whether its tales be of saints or sinners. The Norse tales will also for a time be laid aside, and though they have a powerful humanity, they have little love of Nature. We have been even forced of late to go to India for our subjects. But the Irish stories are as yet untouched ; and they have imagination, colour, romance of war and love, terrible and graceful supernaturalism, a passionate humanity, and a vivid love of natural beauty and sublimity.

When we have got them into fine prose and verse, I believe we shall open out to English Poetry a new and exciting world, an immense range of subjects, entirely fresh and full of inspiration.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, as I

<sup>1</sup> That they have this exciting quality, that they stimulate poetic feeling into creation is not

said, get them out into English, and then we may bring England and Ireland into a union which never can suffer separation, and send another imaginative force on earth which may (like Arthur's Tale) create Poetry for another thousand years.

wholly without proof. The Irish tales in their Gaelic form were taken up by Macpherson, and the clever and poetical recast which he made of them had an extraordinary influence on the new growth of poetry. It was a pity that he did not frankly declare what he did and how much he invented. It was a greater pity still that he told the lie he did when he said they were translations. But for all that, the ground of his poems was in the Gaelic legends of the Irish heroes ; and the power of these legends to awake imagination is proved not only by his own work, but by the influence that work had on European poets. It is interesting to know from Legouv  s *Recollections* that at one time of his life *Ossian* was Napoleon's favourite book.

This expectation of mine may be a dream, but it is a pleasant dream. It deserves fulfilment, and it will have fulfilment if Irishmen love as they ought their ancient oracles. We may yet see Trinity College follow the example of the Catholic University, and have a chair of ancient Irish literature within its walls. We may yet see the study of that literature established in every great town in Ireland, and its stories told in every school and in every family. Great will be their power, and ever greater by their means the love of Ireland!

And now I have finished the main burden of this lecture; that which I purposed to say. The time granted to a lecturer who is to be followed by other speakers is rightly a limited


time, and forbids him to do more than write on one subject. Had I another half hour, I might speak of the second period of literature in the Irish tongue, which began when the great bardic associations were broken up, which continued during the English conquest of Ireland, and which may be said to have ended with Carolan, "the last of the Irish bards," who died in the eighteenth century, 1737. Had I yet more time I might write of the third period of literature in the Irish tongue which lasted, roughly speaking, from 1737 to about 1830, and which was chiefly written under the desperate sorrows of the penal laws, and amidst the wofullest poverty and misery of Ireland; a literature, like that of the second period, full

of lyric love and lyric sorrow. I hope we shall soon have lectures devoted to both these periods, to the translations into English which have been already made of their poetry, and to the best means of getting more of it into the English tongue. There ought to be a Golden Treasury of its best songs in every house in Ireland.

Before these had ceased to be produced in Irish, poetry in English had begun to be written in Ireland. An essay of historical and literary interest might be written for us on the Street Ballads of Ireland, which were the newspapers of the people. Sung from fair to fair and at the corners of every street in the towns, in verses improvised day by day, concerning all the events of war and peace, not only in

Ireland but in foreign lands, they were for the most part wretched productions, but out of them arose from time to time, and even now arise, things of a fine quality, like the "Shan Van Voght," "Willy Reilly," and the "Wearing of the Green." I wish we had a full collection of these street ballads on the shelves of our library, and that we should then publish a selection of the best of them with an historical preface. Ireland is painted there by its own hand with rude force of drawing and richness of colour. It is a thousand pities to let this picture perish.

Yet another lecture might be delivered on the poetry of all the later movements towards an independent Ireland, the results of which



are being worked out at this present moment. It might be prefaced by an account of the Irish poetry of Moore, the poetic value of which has not as yet been worthily estimated, nor its great influence sufficiently exposed. But the proper date of the beginning of this poetry is the date of the foundation of the *Nation* newspaper in '42, by Gavan Duffy. There are four or five collections of the ballads and poems written since '42 ; but they include a number of inferior and of very inferior pieces of poetry. There ought to be a careful selection made of the best of them—another Golden Treasury—and I wish some of our members who have the needful critical ability and the instinct for what is of fine quality, would do this work for Ireland. It also is of

national importance, would kindle into a brighter flame the national spirit, and be itself an impulse towards the new poetry which I trust will arise in Ireland, of a larger method, of a wider range, and of a better form.

We need for that, in my opinion, Home Rule ; but on that I may not speak to-night. We need also for it the reconciliation of the opponent parties of Ireland, which some say will be impossible if Home Rule be given, but which others say will follow in a few years if it is given. Whatever opinion be true, we need for the creation of a noble poetry, peace from internecine quarrels within our own borders. We need, again, as a foundation for this new poetry, the collection



of the old poetry and tales of which I have been speaking, and their transference into English prose and verse. We need also that careful selection of the best of the English poetry as yet written in Ireland which I have advocated to-night. Fine poetry of a new school is born out of the body of a past poetry, and feeds from its breasts. It is kept national by the mass of poetry which has preceded it; gains from it the sense of a continuous life; and when it droops at any time, is set on fire again by the ancient flame.

We need also, if great poets are ever to arise among us, a much more profound study of the great models—of the masters of song both in classic and modern poetry—than has ever yet

